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**ALFRED DOBLIN**

## Diplomacy takes a hit in Sudan

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Monday, July 25, 2005

**By ALFRED DOBLIN**  
**HERALD NEWS**

It's not every day you hear a U.S. secretary of state say: "I am about the only person they did not rough up." Condoleezza Rice got a glimpse of the dysfunctional, anti-democratic government of Sudan last week. Rice's aides, as well as the media traveling with her, were roughed up by Sudanese guards while Rice was paying an official visit to Sudan's President Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir.



In what has to be the second-best quote of the day, Rice's communication's director said: "Diplomacy 101 says you don't rough up your guests." Even Rice's interpreter was blocked from entering a joint meeting between Rice and Bashir. Not a smart move, since Bashir speaks only Arabic. But perhaps this was an opportune event.

The Bush administration has called the extermination of more than 180,000 people in the Darfur region of Sudan genocide. But it has done little to stop the state-sponsored militia's killing spree. More than 1.8 million people have been displaced. The number of murders, rapes and beatings has diminished only because the majority of intended victims are either already dead or in refugee camps.

Last week Sen. Jon Corzine reintroduced legislation to help stop the genocide. The Darfur Peace and Accountability Act, co-sponsored by Sen. Sam Brownback, R-Kan., would impose harsh sanctions against the Sudanese government, strengthen the arms embargo on Sudan and calls for a presidential

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envoy to the region. Corzine said, "Every day Congress fails to act, brutal killers continue to terrorize the people of Darfur with impunity."

Darfur is not high on the American public's radar screen. With armed law enforcement agents patrolling train platforms and subway cars, genocide somewhere in Africa doesn't seem very important. If that really is the case, the terrorists have won.

The United States must remain an advocate for freedom and human rights. If the Bush administration is unwilling to take the lead in stopping the genocide in Darfur, then the war in Iraq is merely a charade over vast oil reserves and not about spreading democracy.

It is impossible to justify the loss of lives in Iraq and the billions of dollars spent in Iraq as an example of America's commitment to freedom if genocide in a poor, petroleum-barren region goes unstopped.

It is exactly at this time in America's history - when it is under attack because it is a haven for freedom - that America should actively protect the human rights of the people in Darfur. It is in America's best interests to see that vast refugee camps do not becoming breeding grounds for new terrorists.

According to reports of Rice's Thursday meeting with Bashir, she received little encouragement from the Sudanese president that the militias will be disarmed. Bashir did not commit to stopping the flow of money to the militias. He said if the militias were disarmed, genocide would result. And he wasn't being ironic.



Rice was angered by the treatment of her staff and of the media. NBC correspondent Andrea Mitchell was dragged out of a pseudo-press conference after she called out a question. While pundits complain the Bush White House treats the media poorly, there is no comparison between what happens in D.C. to what happened in Darfur. And there is no comparison between an NBC reporter being pulled from a room and more than 180,000 people killed by Sudanese-backed militias.

But grabbing Mitchell grabbed U.S. headlines. Darfur made a small comeback in the news because of the shabby treatment given to Rice's entourage. As in the case of homeland security, Americans should not have to choose between secure air travel and secure rail travel. They should have both. And when it comes to genocide in Darfur, Americans should not have to make a Hobson's choice between rebuilding Iraq or saving millions of lives in Sudan. Human rights are not negotiable.

Rice demanded an apology for what happened on Thursday. She received one within an hour. The 1.8 million displaced people from Darfur are still waiting for theirs.

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